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Reflexively used pronouns in Danish – an ongoing demotisation process?

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With regard to third person singular pronouns with genitive function standard Danish distinguishes between pronouns co-referring with the grammatical or semantic subject of their clause (i.e. pronouns used *reflexively*), and pronouns not co-referring with the subject. When the pronoun is co-referential with the subject, the possessive pronoun forms *sin* is chosen. When the pronoun is not co-referential with the subject, a genitive form of a personal pronoun is chosen:

politimanden	stopper	<i>sin</i>	bil
the-policeman	stops	his	car [i.e. the policeman's car]

Vs.

politimanden	stopper	<i>hans</i>	bil
the-policeman	stops	his	car [i.e. somebody else's car]

The distinction between a reflexive and a non-reflexive form does not exist in the case of first and second person pronouns, and in modern standard Danish it is not preserved in the case of third person plural pronouns either.

The norms regarding reflexively used pronouns are explicitly taught in the educational system and deviation from it is diligently corrected by many Danish teachers, at least as far as written language is concerned. When it comes to the spoken language, there has probably always been a great deal of variation, and none of the traditional dialects of Danish have norms with regard to reflexively used pronouns which are exactly like the prescribed norm of standard Danish. First and foremost, the dialects of the western part of the country (Jutland) have a less widespread use of reflexive forms. The paper presents the results of a large scale survey of variation and change with respect to reflexively used pronouns in contemporary spoken Danish. The study which is a part of the LANCHART project is based on panel studies of two age cohorts of speakers, based on old recordings from the 1970s and 80s and recent re-recordings in four different sites in Denmark (including the capital Copenhagen). In addition, new recordings have been made with teenagers from

the same locations. All reflexively used pronouns have been analysed in order to uncover linguistic, social and geo-spatial factors constraining the use of reflexive vs. non-reflexive forms.

The results indicate that there is an ongoing change in the eastern part of Denmark (most pronounced in Copenhagen) in which non-reflexive forms are gaining ground with respect to pronouns with singular reference. The change is in the direction away from the prescribed standard, leading to a greater degree of variation compared to the language use documented in the old recordings from the 1980'ies. In the paper I will argue that the development may be seen as an example of *demotisation* (i.e. a relaxation of the standard norm and a revalorization of formerly low status speech). If there is such a demotisation process going on with respect to reflexive pronouns this may explain why standardization seems to have stopped in Jutland, as the traditional language use of Jutland resembles a radical version of the modern Copenhagen language use.